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ABSTRACT

Six demonstration projects were conducted in England to identify and help meet the basic communication needs of individuals who embarked on work-related skills training. Unemployed adults were divided into two strands. Strand A concentrated on those adults who without significant help with basic communication skills would be unable to reach the threshold of training or employment. Strand B concentrated on those who were already taking part in courses of work preparation but who still needed some help with basic communication skills to make progress. The projects showed that not only do many unemployed adults have difficulties with basic skills, but that it is difficult to separate them arbitrarily into two discrete groups. Strand A projects were particularly successful in improving attainment levels in basic skills among those with real problems and improving their chances of gaining employment. The assumption in Strand B that basic communication skills needs existed within groups attending work preparation courses was confirmed. Assessing needs in a vocational context was both effective and acceptable to trainees. Strand A courses were particularly innovative in developing new curriculum and materials to help trainees develop their basic skills in a work-related context. Both Strand A and B projects demonstrated new and practical ways of assessing literacy and numeracy needs. (YLB)

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# BASIC SKILLS AND UNEMPLOYED ADULTS

## A Report on ALBSU/MSC Demonstration Projects

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ALBSU
Adult Literacy & Basic Skills Unit

MSC Manpower Services Commission

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# Foreword

This Report describes the operation and outcomes of several projects designed to identify and help meet the basic communication needs of individuals who embarked on work-related skills training. Produced jointly by MSC and ALBSU, who also jointly sponsored the Projects, it shows how different approaches across a variety of schemes have addressed the problems and opportunities encountered.

For everyone interested professionally in basic communication skills for adults, this Report should stimulate thought about the particular needs of individuals in training and employment. It shows that tutors as well as trainees have to learn to recognise and respond to these needs in ways that are relevant to them. The Report does not attempt to provide definitive answers but it does point to ways that people in real situations have tackled this particular training challenge. As such, it should help to inform and guide future work.

MSC and ALBSU are grateful to the project teams who ran the schemes and provided the material which enabled this Report to be produced.

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# BASIC SKILLS AND UNEMPLOYED ADULTS

A Report on ALBSU/MSC Demonstration Projects

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# Introduction

1. This Report describes the work and conclusions of six Demonstration Projects funded jointly by the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) and the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) between 1984 and 1986. The Projects presented an opportunity to examine the needs of unemployed adults who faced difficulties in finding employment because of problems with basic communication skills. They also allowed for some experimentation in ways of meeting these needs.

2. The Background and Aims of the Projects, together with a description of the methodology used in each, are described in Sections 2 to 4. Section 5 draws attention to some of the key findings of the six Projects and Section 6 offers an evaluation of the initiatives as a whole.

3. Clearly, this Report contains an evaluation 'from the centre' by the two organisations sponsoring the Projects, rather than the views of individual project workers or other people connected with each Project locally. Moreover, because copies of the detailed reports from each Project are available from ALBSU we have not tried to summarise them in this Report.

# Background to the Demonstration Projects

4. In April 1983, the MSC launched its Discussion Paper "Towards an Adult Training Strategy" with an introduction by Lord Young, then Chairman of MSC, who said that the Paper was:

> **"... about adult training and re-training and the urgent need for all of us to pay more attention to it and for the country as a whole – and the individual institutions and places within it – to provide many wider opportunities for adults in the course of their working lives."**

5. ALBSU's response to the Discussion Paper outlined some of the findings of the Unit's sponsored Special Development Projects concerned with employment and training and reiterated the need for any strategy to take particular account of adults whose need for help in basic education skills was likely to prevent them from reaching the threshold of employment or training.

6. During the Autumn of 1983 and Spring of 1984, discussions took place between ALBSU and MSC with a view to the joint sponsorship, management and evaluation of a number of

national demonstration projects concerned with basic communication skills provision for unemployed adults.

7. In March 1984, a plan was agreed between the MSC and ALBSU for the sponsorship of six projects which set out to identify the level of need for basic communication skills and explore content and methods which would help the organisation of provision. The approach taken concentrated on the needs of two differing groups of unemployed adults which, for operational purposes, were split into two distinct strands.

**STRAND 'A'**: concentrated on those adults who without significant help with basic communication skills would be unable to reach the threshold of training or employment.

**STRAND 'B'**: concentrated on those who were already taking part in courses of Work Preparation funded by MSC, but who still needed some help with basic communication skills in order to make progress. The courses concerned were of the Work-Related Skills and Assessment type (WRSA)*

# Objectives and Approaches

## STRAND 'A'

8. The general objective of Strand 'A' courses was to demonstrate how the needs of those requiring significant help with basic communications skills could best be met. The approach taken was to establish two Projects each staffed by two full-time staff. Each Project designed and ran two full-time courses of up to 20 weeks duration. Bases were established for the Projects in Hull and Telford. Each course was to be designed to help trainees improve their basic communication skills (including literacy and numeracy) with the course content and teaching methods focussed sharply on local employment opportunities.

9. The structure of individual courses varied, although both included:

- basic communication and numeracy skills
- skills relating to the world of work
- group and individual tutorials, counselling and advice sessions
- familiarisation with and training in new technolgy
- extensive use of job rehearsals with local employers
- individual project work.

*(Work Related Skills and Assessment Courses are part of the total range of Work Preparation courses offered under MSC's Wider Opportunities Training Programme which aim to help unemployed people gain access to employment and/or further training opportunities. Course content varies, but is, in the main, based on individual assessment, and includes skill sampling, skills acquisition, new technology, job rehearsals, job hunting and various degrees of support with basic skills. Courses are usually offered in modular form with increasingly open access.)

10. In both Hull and Telford two consecutive courses of 20 weeks were mounted of approximately 30 hours duration per week. Sponsorship of the Projects included funding for 480 part-time teaching hours per course, clerical support, premises, materials and equipment, and up to 16 trainees attended each course, all of whom received a training allowance.

## STRAND 'B'

11. The general objective of Strand 'B' Projects was to explore ways in which basic skills could be identified and subsequently met whilst trainees undertook a Work Preparation Course. The approach taken was to establish four projects, each of which had a full-time project development officer who was assigned to an existing Work Preparation Course, to examine and develop:

- methods and approaches to the identification of the basic skills needs of individuals on Work Preparation Courses
- successful training approaches and teaching strategies
- curriculum design and training materials
- approaches to trainee assessment and the recording of achievement
- an assessment of the implications of any newly developed approaches for other providers, including staff training.

12. It was anticipated that a wide range of occupational skills sampling and acquisition modules would be covered as well as job-seeking skills, covering both short and medium length courses. It was planned that open learning opportunities would be available on at least one course. Clearly, four Projects allowed for a wider exploration of the broad based objectives than would have been possible by examining only one type of course.

13. Bases for these four Projects were established in:

- ***North West England*** at a Vocational Assessment Course run by Simon Engineering plc, Stockport and at the Drop-in Skills Centre (DISC), run by Nelson and Colne College.
- ***North East England*** at the SCOPE programme, run by New College (Durham), Bishop Auckland, Darlington and Peterlee Colleges.
- ***South London*** at the SHAPE programme run by The Polytechnic of the South Bank.

In addition to a full-time development worker, project funding allowed for clerical support, premises, material and equipment.

14. All six of the Projects were jointly managed and monitored by ALBSU and the MSC and regular visits were made by ALBSU and MSC officers to each Project. ALBSU administered the Project on behalf of both organisations. An advisory group containing local interests was also established to provide advice and guidance for each Project and these groups met about four times during the period of the Project. There was also close liaison between the Local Education Authority, MSC Head Office, ALBSU and relevant MSC local and area offices. Each Project was required by MSC and ALBSU to produce an interim and final report.

# The Projects

## HULL (STRAND 'A')

15. The city of Kingston-on-Hull (population 265,000) is in Humberside, the most easterly authority in the Yorkshire and Humberside region. The traditional economy based on fishing and port industries has severely declined in Hull in recent years, and with help through central and local government initiatives, these industries are slowly being replaced by a more diverse range of industries. The nature of the manufacturing and service industries in Hull has meant that the population distribution is weighted towards the less skilled occupational groups and, in most cases, the lower income groups. The percentage of the population registered as unemployment in March 1985 was, at 17.6%, about 4% above the national average.

16. The Project was organised by the Hull Adult Education Service which also offers general adult literacy and basic skills provision for 700-750 students each week. Individual and group tuition is provided during the day and evening, consisting of some substantial and some short part-time courses. The style of tuition varies and includes drop-in opportunities.

17. The Hull Project began in September 1984. The two courses were based at the Local Adult Education Centre which is also used by the Local Authority for adult literacy and basic skills provision. The building is fairly centrally situated, is accessible by public transport and is small enough to allow for a caring, informal atmosphere. The new technology training was held at an annexe about a mile from the Centre.

### Publicity, Recruitment and Selection

18. The courses were publicised using the Authority's Adult Education brochure (about 50,000 copies were circulated), a press release, a leaflet distributed through Job Centres and at the Hull Show. The majority of enquiries came in response to an advertisement in the Hull Daily Mail. Word of mouth publicity, particularly from satisfied participants of the first course, had an effect on the enquiries for the second. The tutors also publicised the course through interviews on Radio Humberside.

19. A considerable number of people made enquiries about both courses some of whom were referred to other provision where their needs could be better served. A total of 147 adults were interviewed of whom 105 were thought to be capable of benefiting from the course.

20. The people recruited were those judged to be in need of significant help with literacy and numeracy and within each course of 16, approximately 5 were judged to require very substantial amounts of individual help due to their extremely limited reading and writing ability.

21. Trainees were about equally balanced between men and women (17 men and 15 women) with an age range between 19 and 50 years (four were younger than 21). The majority had been unemployed for a year or more (22 in all), and most had previously

worked in a wide variety of jobs before becoming unemployed including childcare, factory work, nursing, shipyard work, the Army, shop work, fishing, warehousing, and labouring.

## The Courses

22. Each 20 week course consisted of:
    - centre based induction
    - centre based tuition in basic skills
    - skills related to the world of work
    - new technology
    - individual projects
    - centre based guidance and counselling
    - job rehearsals held on employers' premises.

23. The approximate weekly time allocated given to the centre-based tuition was:
    - 10 hours communication and numeracy workshop
    - 11 hours individual work and the 'world of work'
    - 4 hours new technology
    - 2 hours project work
    - 2 hours careers advice and counselling
    - 1 hour group counselling.

24. Induction played an important role both for trainees and tutors, familiarising trainees with different course elements and hastening the 'gelling' of the groups. This induction period included a range of individual and group exercises including initial self-assessment and tutor appraisal of each trainee's competence in basic communication skills and their initial vocational interest. It also included 'tasters' into the rest of the course, such as a visit to new technology facilities to show the future direction of the course.

25. In the communications and numeracy workshop sessions, an individual approach was adopted early in the course which was later modified in response to trainees' requests to introduce more group work. Moreover, the flexibility of the timetable also allowed trainees to spend extra time on particular skills where necessary.

26. The 'world of work' sessions were run on a modular basis, integrated closely with the basic communication skills elements, allowing trainees to establish their basic competence in the context of their applicability to work. The new technology module, organised in conjunction with a local college, was concerned with the wider applications of new technology to employment and, in addition, enabled trainees to learn how to operate a computer.

27. Learning was drawn together and consolidated by the use of specific projects spanning a number of subject areas. One example was the 'Occupational Awareness Project' which provided a valuable vehicle for pursuing the course objectives, and was a way of establishing an independent approach to study by using trainee motivation towards a particular occupational interest area.

28. Job rehearsals consisted of four weeks placement spread over the length of the course during which all trainees were placed with local employers. Following enquiries to over 100 firms, 13 were selected and the type of work included:

- shop and retail work
- gardening/horticultural work
- manufacturing
- telephone and office duties
- hotel work
- warehousing/packaging

29. The importance of adequate preparation before placement was emphasised by the course tutors. Visits were made to potential sponsors to explain the course aims and objectives and trainee needs, and to ensure that the placement was suitable in terms of the purpose of the course. Job relevance appeared to be the key to success, with the trainees' career objectives being related to the work experience offered. Other factors included the location and reputation of the sponsor and getting an accurate match between the stage reached by a trainee on the course and the work experience offered. Some trainees returned for a second week with the same sponsor although no-one spent more than two weeks with any one employer as variation was felt to be useful experience for trainees.

30. Placement sponsors were involved in trainee assessments and provided feedback about their aptitudes and attainment. They were invited to complete a specially designed questionnaire which was used by tutors and participants to relate the job rehearsal experience to subsequent basic skills sessions at the centre. This reinforced the learning and enhanced its relevance within the overall programme.

## TELFORD (STRAND 'A')

31. Telford in Shropshire is a new town which has seen a dramatic population rise in recent years as people from outside the area have moved from Birmingham and other urban parts of the West Midlands, to settle in an area which is essentially rural in character. The population of Telford is 107,000 (1983) with a level of unemployment of 21% compared with 15.3% and 13.1% in the West Midlands and the United Kingdom respectively at the time of the Project.

32. The decline in traditional metal work industries has been continuous and many of the new firms moving into the town are involved in new technology and high technology. Adult literacy and basic skills is provided almost entirely through the local College of Further Education and provision is mainly in groups held in the College buildings. All existing basic education provision is part-time.

33. The Project began on 1st November, 1984 and the first course started on 3rd December. It was based in the Telford Opportunities Centre, a skills training centre on an industrial estate. This setting gave the Project a clear vocational orientation as it ran alongside other specific skills training courses. Moreover, other organisations based in the centre were particularly helpful in providing placements and other resources.

## Publicity/Recruitment and Selection

34. Publicity and recruitment were almost entirely through the local Job Centre which displayed typewritten cards and posters to advertise the courses. Posters were also displayed in libraries, Advice Bureaux and Doctors' surgeries and a local newspaper published an article about the courses and carried an advert. In all, 38 potential trainees were interviewed and 25 selected for the two courses. The local MSC office helped with the interviews and trainees were selected for their motivation, ability to benefit from the course and keenness to obtain employment. Three trainees joined the first course after it had begun and eight trainees joined the second course after the start; all however, joined in the first 10 weeks.

35. Most of the trainees who joined the courses had been unemployed for long periods. This was particularly so on the first course where the average period of unemployment of trainees was 2½ years with a range of between 6 months and 6 years. Six trainees had been unemployed for 3 years or more and all but one, unemployed for a year or more. A similar pattern occurred on the second course, although late recruits tended to have been unemployed for a shorter time.

36. The literacy and numeracy needs of trainees were quite high. Taking the two courses together, 12 trainees were either assessed as non-readers or had very little attainment and 6 trainees were speakers of English as a Second Language (ESL). In fact, the number of trainees in need of help with ESL accepted onto the course was higher than expected considering the numbers of adults from ethnic minorities in the local population. However, they were fairly easily accommodated on the course as one of the staff was an experienced ESL tutor.

## The Course

37. The aims and objectives of the courses in Telford were, in general, similar to those in Hull although the approach to job rehearsal was somewhat different. In Telford, trainees went to placements as and when they became available, rather than all at the same time.

38. The approximate weekly time allocation to the main subject areas is shown below, although variations between the two courses took place in light of the experience gained from the first.

| | *Course 1* | *Course 2* |
|---|---|---|
| Literacy | 9 hours per week | 12 hours per week |
| Numeracy | 9 hours per week | 8 hours per week |
| New technology | 2.5 hours per week | 2 hours per week |
| Communication skills | 2.5 hours per week | 2 hours per week |
| Job search and the world of work | 2.5 hours per week | 2 hours per week |
| Project | 2.5 hours per week | 2 hours per week |
| Private study/ counselling | 2 hours per week | 2 hours per week |

39. Much of the course was designed to encourage trainees to work in groups, enabling supportive roles between trainees to be developed alongside tutor support. However, individual study was used extensively in literacy and numeracy to meet specific trainee needs. A fairly wide range of material was also developed to provide a varied programme. Although tutors used existing publications for ideas, they also developed their own material to ensure relevance to adult trainees' needs.

40. Job search and the world of work sessions aimed to give trainees a practical approach to employment and provide a greater awareness of the opportunities which could be exploited. New technology provided familiarisation with basic principles of operating a micro-computer, together with an appreciation of employment opportunities created by new technology in industry and commerce. Communication skills linked the programme elements and were found to be particularly effective when used in job search and employment situations.

41. Job rehearsal placements in Telford were predominantly in the public sector or with publicly sponsored organisations. Placements offered experience in:

- ancillary work in nurseries and playgroups
- general office work
- data input, programming and word processing
- working with the physically handicapped
- general care in Day Centres
- tyre fitting and tyre/wheel repair.

42. From the first week trainees were encouraged to indicate their interest in a particular type of placement and employers were approached with specific trainees in mind. As it was necessary to ensure that sponsors were prepared for trainees and vice-versa, an initial visit was made to each potential placement for job rehearsal to explain the aims and objectives of the courses and agree the method of training to be used.

43. Whilst on job rehearsal, trainees were required to complete a daily log of activities, a questionnaire about the organisation of the firm and, where appropriate, a worksheet about the placement. (For example, trainees who worked in an office were asked to investigate how the office used new technology). Employers were involved in assessing trainees' progress and achievements by completing a questionnaire and through telephone conversations with tutors. Detailed discussions about the placements were held with the trainees on their return to the centre to confirm the relevance of job rehearsal to the programme and use the knowledge gained in projects, where applicable.

## NELSON AND COLNE COLLEGE (STRAND 'B')

44. Nelson and Colne College is situated in the Pendle area of Lancashire which has a population of approximately 84,000. The area has, in the past, had a flourishing textile industry as well as light engineering and furniture, although in recent years, the decline in these industries has resulted in a substantial increase in unemployment (i.e. 14.9% of the workforce in March 1985).

45. The College has been actively involved in a number of educational initiatives in recent years, including the development of independent learning materials. The Drop-In Skills Centre (DISC), which was opened to the public in January 1984, is located in a modern factory unit close to the centre of Nelson and is separated from the main College premises. DISC is primarily concerned with assessment and skill sampling. Trainees work from learning materials, the main component of which is written text. Technician staff supervise the work and make progress assessments. This trainee-centred approach enables people to work at their own pace, requesting help from technician staff as and when they need it. DISC is open to adults aged 18 to 65 and there are no formal entry requirements. The assessment modules give basic insights into a variety of vocational skills related to Construction, Electronics, New Technology, and Office Skills. Trainees undertake a task, or series of tasks, to complete a module and are assessed at appropriate stages.

46. In addition to vocational/technical assessment, the DISC programme includes an assessment of basic skills in literacy and numeracy in order to identify trainees' attainments in these areas. The College also provides a service of basic maths, English and English as a Second Language tuition for trainees who express a need for literacy, numeracy or language support. In a typical week, between 150 and 200 trainees spend approximately 750 to 1,000 hours at DISC. About 80% are unemployed and around 30% are ethnic minority adults of Asian origin.

## The Project

47. The Project started at DISC in September 1984 with the recruitment of a Project Development Officer. In addition to the main objective for Strand B projects, the Project focussed on the:

- identification of areas of difficulty that trainees have in using independent materials
- an analysis of whether such difficulties are related to the production and operation of the independent materials, or to trainee difficulties with basic skills.

An important factor in the analysis was to ensure that the validity of the assessment was not lost by an over-simplification of the materials.

48. A number of assessment modules were selected for analysis and a series of case studies established in order to follow trainees' progress from joining the course to leaving. Interviews were held with trainees and questionnaires used to obtain feedback after they had left, although, it was not possible to obtain feedback from trainees who left the course early.

49. Having identified a wide variety of difficulties, the Project Development Officer set out to examine the materials being used and, where appropriate, to simplify and re-introduce them. A number of examples of improved materials were introduced with guidelines for staff, advising them on how to recognise and deal with potential difficulties. These were discussed with the tutors at short seminars.

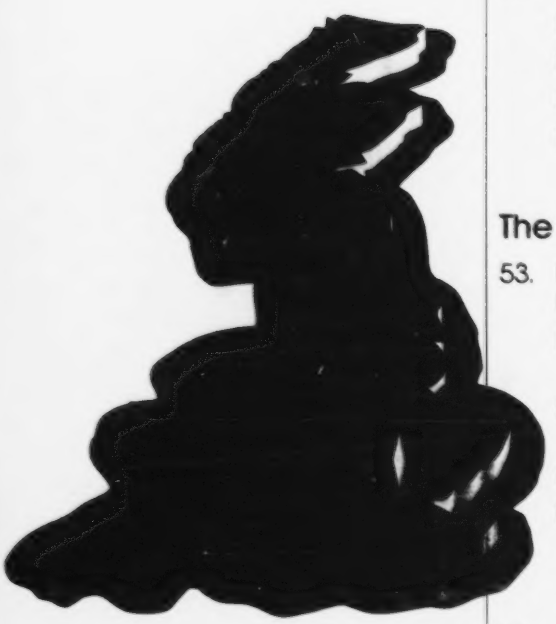
50. Problems identified as arising from the trainees' attainment in basic skills were dealt with by the Development Officer, by initially introducing a range of assessment and self-assessment techniques and then by introducing supportive materials. Where needs were substantial, referral to specific additional College provision was encouraged.

## POLYTECHNIC OF THE SOUTH BANK (STRAND 'B')

51. The Project at the Polytechnic of the South Bank focussed on the MSC-funded SHAPE (Self Help Action Project for Employment) course run by the Polytechnic's Extra Faculty Unit. The SHAPE course first started in October 1981 and is intended for unemployed people to train in order to re-enter employment or go on to further training or education. The course has been particularly successful in attracting trainees from ethnic minority groups (about 70% of trainees are from ethnic minorities). SHAPE offers training of up to 10 weeks concentrating on commercially related skills such as business and office and clerical work (a major traditional source of employment in London). Trainees attend for up to 21 hours a week.

52. The SHAPE course includes:

- self presentation
- communication
- computing
- word processing
- book keeping
- typing
- law
- business studies



### The Project

53. In addition to the broad Strand B objectives, specific aims for the Project were to:

- examine ways to assess trainees' needs for basic literacy and numeracy, before entering the SHAPE course
- liaise with tutors to promote curriculum development in literacy and numeracy within existing modules
- develop course materials
- provide tuition in communication, literacy and numeracy for individual trainees to help them with problems and analyse results.

54. The Project work involved an analysis of recruitment and selection procedures with the introduction of trainee assessment procedures to determine individual requirements. This process was continued through three intakes of SHAPE trainees with the Project Worker carrying out detailed interviews. This general approach also continued through an assessment of individuals' work as they progressed through the various SHAPE topics.

55. Additionally, the Project Worker liaised closely with the tutors to examine the literacy and numeracy demands of the various subjects, and to determine how trainees could be supported through the course if they had basic skills difficulties. A 'reading scan' of materials to ascertain levels of difficulty was also undertaken.

56. During the Project, additional materials were developed and different methods tried out by the tutors to help trainees. These included the introduction of supplementary material into the curriculum such as worksheets on vocabulary, redesigned handouts, etc. Considerable work was also undertaken on the self-presentation module to improve trainees' basic skills.

## NORTH EASTERN ENGLAND (STRAND 'B')

57. The SCOPE programme is offered in a number of colleges of further education in the North East of England. It began in 1982 as a result of a review of existing work preparation programmes and was introduced as a means of increasing the number of participants who could get access to work preparation programmes. The programme recruits through a half day open seminar and begins formally with a group workshop, job search, applications, and interview techniques. This is followed by an opportunity to sample and explore a wide range of work related skills modules. This model has proved to have considerable flexibility, allowing trainees to choose from the range of technical and vocational work offered by the colleges. In May 1985 an enhanced SCOPE programme was introduced which made additional training modules available.

58. The four colleges involved in the project (New College, Durham, Peterlee Tertiary College, Darlington College of Further Education and Bishop Auckland College) are all part of the Durham Local Education Authority and are all situated in areas of high unemployment. The level of male unemployment ranges from 21.3% to 26.1% in an area which has seen a decline in industries such as coal, steel and shipbuilding.

### The Project

59. The Project Worker was recruited in December 1984 to operate across all four Colleges. The specific objectives of the Project were to:

- identify the basic educational and communication skills needed by participants, to enable them to reach the threshold of employment
- help individuals assess themselves in relation to their attainment levels and future skills requirements
- consider how best to integrate the acquisition of such skills into a work related context
- develop materials and methods to help in the improvement of basic skills
- liaise with staff and raise their general awareness of problems and needs experienced by the long-term unemployed who require help with basic skills.

60. Training methods and materials were reviewed and a representative sample of assessment tasks were analysed to determine the level of attainment required by trainees in reading, comprehension, writing, presentation, speaking, listening and numeracy. To achieve this, the Project Worker worked alongside trainees across a number of work-related training options, including craft-skills, catering, computing and book-keeping. The

Project Worker also undertook a study to discover the perception of both the SCOPE tutors and trainees of basic skills problems. The findings of this work was fed back in short meetings with tutors. Developing links between SCOPE and the adult basic education provision within the colleges was also important to see how programmes could link together.

61. Much practical work was undertaken to establish the level of support that could realistically be given to SCOPE trainees to help them with basic skills. Examples of materials developed included a series of self-assessment checklists and a self-directing booklet aimed at helping trainees write a curriculum vitae.

## STOCKPORT (STRAND 'B')

62. Simon Engineering plc is part of a holding company, the Simon Group, based in Stockport which controls and owns some fifty trading subsidiaries in the UK and abroad. The company employs approximately 7,000 people throughout the world and is organised into five operating sub-groups:

- food engineering
- process plant contracting
- manufacturing of specialised machinery
- chemical merchants and storage
- oil services

The Simon Group Education Department offers a variety of training opportunities for the company's own employees and provides training for other companies and public agencies.

63. The Vocational Assessment Programme is sponsored by the MSC and is intended for unemployed adults. On a modular programme, trainees attend 3 days per week for up to 8 weeks. Examples of assessment for skill modules on offer are:

- engineering
- building
- mechanics
- new technology

A Social and Life Skills module concentrates on the skills of applying for work and is taken by all trainees. The programme is flexible and takes trainees on a rolling programme basis. The number of trainees completing the module is high, although many complete the programme over longer than 8 consecutive weeks. Trainees continue to claim benefits to which they are entitled and have their travel costs reimbursed by MSC. Recruitment is by contact and liaison with the Job Centres and the Vocational Assessment Supervisor attends at Job Centres to deal with enquiries.

### The Project

64. The Project aimed to identify the relationship between assessment in vocational modules and literacy and numeracy, and to supplement the programme with advice and support in basic skills. The Project aimed to identify trainees who could be given assistance whilst taking an assessment module without embarrassing trainees who needed help but were unwilling to ask.

65. The Project Worker became involved by actually working alongside the trainees to observe training methods and determine their level of need. On the spot help to individuals in the various workshops was provided and this kind of provision increased considerably during the course of the Project. Longer periods of tuition were often provided in a small office next to the workshop.

66. In addition to trainee support the Project Worker provided informal staff development. This took the form of help and support for the vocational assessors to develop awareness that trainees' achievements in vocational assessment might be hampered by their poor basic skills or the complexity of the working manuals they were dealing with.

67. Materials developed for the Project included task based assessments to provide information about trainees' literacy/numeracy abilities as well as those for vocational skill. Examples of these assessments include "The Use of Micro-computers" and "Making a Tool Box". These exercises were specifically designed to include reading and writing tasks.

# Evaluation

## STRAND A COURSES

68. Both the Hull and Telford courses appeared successfully to achieve the aim of relating employment skills to basic communication skills teaching. Moreover, careful planning meant both group and individual assessment and learning programmes could be used, the curriculum was closely integrated, new additional teaching material was developed and finally project work and job rehearsals were developed as an integral part of each course.

69. The demand for places on the courses in Hull and Telford varied quite widely. In Hull, the number of potential trainees was far in excess of the number of places available, yet in Telford demand appeared to be substantially more modest. Whether this reflects the considerable differences between a new town, in a largely rural county, and an urban city, based on declining traditional industries, is unclear. What is clear, are the considerable differences between the publicity and recruitment methods used in Hull and Telford.

70. In Hull, an established basic education scheme – well known and on its own site – used a wide variety of publicity techniques to encourage interest. Moreover, existing basic education students were a source of trainees as well as valuable word of mouth publicists. In Telford, however, it is fair to say that existing basic education provision was less comprehensive and less well developed. Moreover, existing provision was based in a college of further education which is not centrally sited and this may have confused potential trainees. The reliance on the Job Centre as the major source of recruitment and the use of written information alone may also have deterred some potential trainees, as may

mistaken de-selection. Close liaison between training providers and Job Centre staff is obviously of crucial importance in developing provision.

71. The job rehearsals element of courses, in both Hull and Telford, proved particularly useful although some trainees initially questioned their value. Moreover, a number of trainees were offered employment as a result of job rehearsals and this appears to indicate that where trainees are given the opportunity to demonstrate their worth directly, rather than having to overcome barriers erected by interviews and forms, they can impress employers.

72. At the end of the Project in Hull, 9 trainees were known to have obtained jobs (5 as a result of job rehearsals); and most of the others continued with further education or training. In Telford 8 trainees obtained jobs prior to the end of the first course, as did 6 trainees from the second course.

73. In Hull good liaison was established with providers of other educational opportunities and this encouraged staff and trainees to draw on additional expertise and materials for individual programmes. Moreover, contributions to the course from the local Careers Service meant that the trainees' expectations about possible employment were realistic, and based on employment opportunities likely to be available locally.

74. Successfully relating employment skills and experience to basic education needs and making provision for individual counselling and guidance was the key to motivating students, as were the attitudes and methods used by the project staff and tutors. Thus, attainment in basic skills could be improved as other more general education and training took place, all linked to increasing the individual's ability to seek and obtain employment.

75. Finally, flexibility was crucial. For example, the need to increase the amount of literacy and numeracy tuition in Telford as a result of perceived trainee needs gave rise to the development of distinct communication skills units related to specific job requirements.

## Strand B Courses

76. The Project based at DISC in Nelson and Colne, revealed how difficult it is to assess accurately trainees' ability with basic skills particularly at entry. However, as trainees often had little or no previous experience of using written independent learning materials, their difficulties with literacy and numeracy were generally revealed during the Project.

77. Part of the problem with independent learning was that the materials were written at too high a level and, thus, adaptation was necessary to enable trainees to cope with the materials. Moreover, few staff had much experience in assessing or coping with the problems of students with limited basic skills and this emphasised the need for increased and improved staff training.

78. Trainees entering the SHAPE courses in South London were assessed through analysis of enrolment and interviews. Of 36

trainees, 17 could write competently, 11 had basic problems with sentence construction, spelling and punctuation and 8 trainees had acute difficulties with writing including letter formation and basic syntax. Almost all also lacked confidence and were unsure of future directions.

79. It was found that where basic skills problems were not too severe, trainees could be helped as part of the course through adapting and preparing additional materials linked to a particular vocational interest. However, where basic skills problems were fairly acute, trainees needed rather more help than a relatively short course, such as SHAPE, could provide. Moreover, although material could be successfully simplified, below a certain level simplification was not really possible.

80. For the majority of trainees on the SCOPE programme in North East England, this course helped them identify their basic skills needs. However, as with DISC, assessment before entry proved very difficult particularly as few trainees appeared to have entered SCOPE with the intention of improving basic skills. As with SHAPE, the Project indicated that whilst some less acute basic communication skills needs could be met, other more serious basic skills problems made the value of the programme, for some trainees, questionable.

81. Analysis of the option modules indicated that whilst some made such limited demands on trainees' abilities that they were unrepresentative of real work, others were so difficult that trainees with basic skills needs quickly lost their motivation. Although only about 5% of trainees felt that they had basic skills difficulties, tutors felt that more like 10% actually had fairly serious problems.

82. Many of the trainees involved in the Vocational Assessment Programme at Simon Engineering admitted during interviews that they would not be interested in taking a course of further education unless it had some vocational element within it, even if such a course would have helped them improve their basic skills. However, when the option of a further week's training concentrating on literacy and numeracy was offered, many of the trainees were keen to take advantage of it.

83. A good deal of the Assessment Programme involved staff helping trainees recognise and assess their own basic skills needs. Moreover, the Project Worker found that by working alongside trainees in the workshop areas, she was able to help them deal with basic skills problems as they arose.

# Conclusion

84. Two particular themes recur throughout all six Projects; first, the difficulties involved in identifying and assessing need and second, the appropriateness of particular approaches to meet identified needs.

85. The Project set out originally to distinguish within the target group between:–

- those who without significant help with basic communication skills would be unable to reach the threshold of training and employment

  and

- those in need of some help with basic communication skills as part of a Work Preparation Course.

The assumption was that the first group would need a substantial amount of tuition and help and would be the target group for the two Strand A Projects, while the second group would have less acute problems and were likely to be identified amongst attenders on the courses examined in the Strand B approach.

86. In practice, the Projects showed that not only do many unemployed adults have difficulties with basic skills, but that it is difficult to arbitrarily separate them into two discrete groups. In all of the Projects, it became apparent that only as the Project developed, did the real level of need begin to emerge. This was true even of the Strand A courses – where selection had deliberately focussed on the most disadvantaged – and was demonstrated by the need for considerable modifications to course design during the early phases of each course.

87. The Projects went on to reveal more about the nature of need as provision was implemented. Strand A projects were particularly successful in improving attainment levels in basic skills amongst those with very real problems and improving their chances of gaining employment. Significantly though, whilst the courses were highly successful at integrating literacy and numeracy with work related content, both felt that there was a need for a considerable basic education input first, to give confidence and a foundation on which to build. Only when this was established, was it appropriate to progress to work-related basic skills and practical activities such as skills training and job rehearsals. This meant in some cases that at least half the time was spent on basic education.

88. The assumption in Strand B provision that basic communication skills needs existed within groups attending Work Preparation Courses was also confirmed, with a significant minority of individuals being identified as having basic skills weaknesses. Again the level of help required varied, which meant while some could be helped within the context of their course, others clearly could not. For the latter, their ability to benefit from the course was, therefore, placed in doubt and may explain the reasons why some trainees left courses early. In Simon Engineering additional modules of literacy and numeracy were provided when the level of need became apparent.

89. The difficulty of initial assessment, perhaps, means that increased flexibility and availability of resources is needed to meet emerging needs. Lessons learnt from the Projects suggest that even with lengthy provision of the Strand A type, initial assessment is still fairly difficult. Clearly, the distinction between those adults in need of substantial help with basic skills and those whose level of basic education means that 'brushing up' is what is needed, is important for the construction of education and training courses. However, identifying which individuals fit into which group is problematic. Perhaps, rather more work is needed on the assessment of unemployed adults' basic skills needs prior to referral to a particular course.

90. It was confirmed that assessing needs in a vocational context is both effective and acceptable to trainees. Several trainees joining courses to sample or learn new skills, became motivated to improve their basic skills when they saw that this might overcome some barriers to progress. It was also demonstrated that the identification of basic skills weaknesses on courses is not always brought out during skills sampling and, indeed, trainees are often not fully aware of the basic skills demands of particular employment opportunities. Several refinements were introduced to a number of sampling tasks to show how this situation can be improved. A number of the skills sampling tests were modified in the DISC programme and this essentially meant using the following methods: simplification of written and drawn materials, the provision of a glossary, devising maths worksheets and providing a self test for various stages of the assessment units in Plumbing, Electronics, Painting and Decorating and Computing. At Simon Engineering, an initial assessment package was devised on "Using the Micrometer" which aimed to combine literacy and numeracy with skills common to several occupational skills areas. By increasing staff awareness of the literacy and numeracy elements of skills assessments and by modifying assessment materials, trainees could be helped to overcome their initial reluctance to consider and deal with literacy and numeracy difficulties.

91. One of the implications of identifying additional basic skills needs is an increased demand for tutorial support. There was some collaboration and co-operation between the Strand B courses and other provision available locally. In the SCOPE and DISC Projects for example, several trainees whose needs were identified through vocational activities were referred to additional courses run by the providers concerned. These courses were usually available for only two or three hours a week and this was often not enough to improve trainees' basic skills in the time available.

92. Unless the aims and resourcing of Work Preparation Courses are revised, then they are only likely to be useful in identifying needs and offering some limited support. What is necessary is the existence of other adequate basic skills provision such as further support alongside or prior to training. There seems to be a strong case for looking at the good practice emerging from the Strand B Projects and considering their role in relation to assessment pre-Work Preparation or indeed other forms of help and support.

93. The Projects had a related message for the marketing of provision and trainee motivation to seek help with basic skills. Both Strands of

the initiative serve to indicate that basic education by itself is evidently not attractive to some adults. Sometimes where help with basic skills was available alongside a Work Preparation Course it was not always readily taken up and many trainees only became motivated to improve their basic skills when they saw this as a route to obtaining further training or employment. The Projects therefore did some work in relating course content and methods, materials development and evaluation of learning to vocational requirements.

94. The SHAPE Course at the Polytechnic of the South Bank included a Law Module which required a fairly sophisticated approach to legal problems and some understanding of legal terms. A working knowledge of Commerce was also required. In conjunction with other staff, simulated business situations were set up for students to practise their communication skills and apply their developing knowledge of business practice in an integrated way. In SCOPE, exercises were devised which related communication skills and literacy to job seeking including interviews, filling in forms and writing a curriculum vitae.

95. Strand A courses were particularly innovative in developing new curriculum and materials to help trainees develop their basic skills in a work-related context. The use of new technology as an acceptable vehicle for learning had the double edge of helping trainees to improve their basic skills as well as providing new skills suitable for modern employment opportunities. The work undertaken on job rehearsals illustrated a range of good practices encompassing the preparation of trainees and employers for the experience, how experience can be evaluated to the benefit of trainees and the place of job rehearsals in courses of this nature. The value of work related projects as a means of developing trainee autonomy and direction was also demonstrated.

96. Both Strand A and Strand B projects demonstrated new and practical ways of assessing literacy and numeracy needs. Similarly evidence was produced of how materials can be adapted and used by trainees to support other vocational activities sometimes independently. In Hull, trainees worked on a detailed study of an occupational area which they were interested in. Information was obtained from a variety of sources and the work was felt to have had a number of beneficial effects. In some cases this meant that trainees had a better idea of what to expect and where applications might be more successful. Both the Hull and Telford courses included work on New Technology, particularly with respect to applications of new technology. One of the benefits of this was to reassure students who were intimidated by computers and micro-technology and to give trainees some knowledge of expanding areas of employment. Although trainees required a good deal of support in carrying out these tasks, particularly in study skills and information retrieval, the development of literacy and numeracy in a relevant and meaningful context was felt to be important.

97. The Projects also showed that many staff/instructors involved in helping the unemployed – particularly in workshop type activity – need help and guidance in recognising basic skills difficulties amongst trainees, as well as in-service training opportunities. The need for this is intrinsically linked with the availability of supportive

provision since this provides the incentive for instructors to show trainees not only that they need help but where it is available.

98. Finally, it was not intended that the Projects should prescribe solutions to issues concerning the availability of provision or its funding; rather the whole initiative was concerned with the nature of needs and how they can be met practically. For both ALBSU and the MSC what type of provision is necessary is as important an issue as how it is provided.

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